

Malaysian palm oil takes its battle to the air

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian palm oil has taken to the airwaves to counter bad press in the West.

Advertisements explaining its efficacy can be seen over BBC and CNN and will be on till December, to educate Europeans and Americans on how it can help them live healthy lives.

The advertisements, developed by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) through its advertising agency, TBWA-ISC, are also geared at getting Malaysian palm oil to be better accepted.

"Malaysia palm oil is actually more beneficial than most people think. The campaign communicates that message. We tell consumers that Malaysian palm oil is good for nature and humans," said Aaron Cowie, chief operating

officer of TBWA-ISC's Malaysian office.

According to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, the European Union bought 875,952 tonnes of palm oil in the first five months of this year, 17 per cent less than in the same period last year.

Consumers in Europe, the United States, Middle East, South Asia and Asia Pacific have been watching two versions of the advertisement, shot in an oil palm plantation in the Klang Valley, since April.

The full version is 60 seconds in duration. The second version comprises two 30-second segments that are aired separately, one emphasising health and the other the environment.

Cowie said the advertisements

were presented in a "feel good manner" without offence to any party.

He also said TBWA-ISC surveys indicated that most Europeans and Americans depended on the media for information about palm oil.

Meanwhile, Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said most Westerners did not know what an oil palm tree or its fruit looked like. He said they thought oil palm resembled corn or soya bean crops.

"These are seasonal crops and they are replanted annually. Oil palm is a tree crop that can be harvested for 25 years."

Chin said the advertisements were aimed at educating those

unfamiliar with palm oil.

"We realise that re-education is a long process, but we have to start somewhere to counter the campaign of misinformation being run by NGOs overseas."

Chin said palm oil was being boycotted, especially in Britain, where a spate of negative articles in the mainstream media had been written by people who knew very little about the commodity.

The negative stereotype that "palm oil equals destruction of orang utan" had been built over the past two years, he added.

"It started out with flyers from NGOs and little articles here and there," he said.

Those who wish to view the commercial can log on to www.malaysiapalmoil.org.